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ABSTRACT

Despite institutional reluctance to move away from a traditional lecture format for content presentation and written exams and term papers for evaluation, a team-taught course entitled "Integration of Learning Theory and Teaching Methodology" has been taught at Marist College, a small liberal arts college in New York. Rather than dividing the course into two discrete sections taught autonomously by each instructor, both instructors attend and remain actively involved in all class sessions. The course content, objectives, materials, and methodologies are jointly planned and the coursework provides for student collaboration during each of the 12 class sessions and in such creative learning activities as body/kinesthetic projects and presentations, drawing activities, visualizations, and listening to music. In addition, the final examination requires students to work together to demonstrate the application of learning theories. Students are also required to write case-study papers individually or in pairs, while the papers are reviewed by both instructors. Formal student course evaluations have generally been positive, with many students stating that they had never worked so hard for a course, but that they had learned a great deal and felt better prepared to work in groups and engage in complex problem-solving experiences. Despite the program's successes, many administrators and faculty members at Marist have continued to question the course's group work and nontraditional learning activities. (MAB)

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Cooperative Teaching Designed to Enhance Cooperative Learning

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At Marist College, a small liberal arts college in eastern New York, most courses are generally presented in a traditional framework. The majority of instructors rely heavily upon the lecture format for content presentation. Written tests and term papers are the most common form of evaluation. Although psychological and educational research has demonstrated that students have a variety of learning styles and benefit from a variety of instructional and assessment techniques, many college teachers have been reluctant to move away from the more traditional approaches.

The reluctance to move away from these methods of instruction and assessment is not surprising because these methods often are effective for many college students. Although effective, it does not mean that they are the most effective they can be or that they are effective for all types of learners. Employers are increasingly making demands for schools to help train students to be critical thinkers. The traditional modes of instruction may limit the development of individuals who will be required to think critically in the highly complex 21st century.

We have been team teaching a course entitled "Integration of Learning Theory and Teaching Methodology" for the past two years. We believe the experiences we have had in this course are applicable to most secondary, undergraduate and graduate level courses.

Administrators and other faculty were not altogether supportive of this cooperative teaching effort. Statements that were made included, "Why would you want to work together?" Administration questioned whether they wanted to support the time and cost for two faculty members to teach one course. Other faculty argued that the course required too much work and that it was not a feasible mode of teaching. We believe the extra effort is justified. We believe this method of instruction helps students to learn collaboration skills by observing instructors with very different styles successfully collaborating.

Marist College, like most colleges, has had relatively few courses that are team taught. Those courses that have team teaching often have one instructor who is responsible for certain sections or aspects of the course and another instructor who is responsible for the other sections. In most cases, each instructor is also responsible for assessment of the students' learning within only their designated sections of the course. Often, only one member of the teaching team is present during class time. The concept of team teaching, in this case, involves dividing up the responsibilities rather than working together to present the course material. The course is more like small mini-units linked together into one course. All too often, the linkage may be weak or even non-existent.

We believe that a team teaching model can be created

that is more effective than the model described above. Based on this belief, we attempted to provide the students in our course with varying perspectives by integrating very different instructional styles into the course. This teaching experience has also helped us better understand that we have different styles of learning, as well. In our team, the instructor who in the past relied heavily on providing lecture experiences, now much more comfortably integrates group work into course presentations. The other instructor, who tended to rely more heavily on group-work activities has become more comfortable supporting a lecture-oriented approach.

We attempted to model a collaborative process for all aspects of the course. Both instructors are present and actively involved during all class sessions. We jointly plan all classroom activities. All course content, objectives, materials, and processes are worked on together and a consensus is reached. When one of us is presenting material or leading a class activity, the other instructor is providing active support. Our intent is to model equal instructional leadership.

One of the major goals of this effort was to enable students to be reflective and to begin to change the way they view both learning and teaching. Many of the students in the course plan teaching as a career or at least a portion of their career. The course content included the presentation of theories which suggested that educators need to acknowledge varying student learning styles. These theories also suggest that educators need to provide learning experiences which will encourage critical thinking and collaboration. We believe that one key to success as students become employees is the ability to engage in successful collaboration.

In addition to being able to observe collaboration, the students also experienced collaborative activities during each of the twelve class sessions. The student process was very active and incorporated the work of both Howard Gardner and David Lazear. The students were exposed to and encouraged to experience learning through different modes. They were asked to fully engage in activities and projects designed to help understand the material of this course. Students were frequently assigned to work together in groups. The students' final examination required that they work together in groups of three or four students to demonstrate the application of learning theories to the other members of the class and to the instructors. They were required to use methods which showed their understanding of the course material, which recognized the need to appeal to various styles of learning, and to put into action the learning theories modeled by the instructional team. In addition, the final presentation needed to follow sound instructional practices/theories.

In order for the students to benefit from group work,

a considerable amount of time was devoted to teaching students appropriate group roles. We believe that teaching group roles and reflecting about the group process is critical for successful group activities. Group activities included engaging the students in specific tasks designed to encourage higher-order/critical thinking skills. Students were asked to discuss situations which were relevant to them. Students were frequently asked to be reflective about group work. That is, they were asked to analyze what worked and what didn't work and to consider whether or not they were being effective group members.

In addition to group work, students were asked to write papers either individually or in pairs. These papers were responses to self-generated, real-world learning scenarios, or cases, which the students analyzed by applying one of the learning theories to the case. Students turned in two copies of all written work. This allowed us to evaluate each student's implementation independently. This evaluation included an analysis of the problem and specific learning theory that was applied. The instructors then met together to review the individual student evaluations. Both evaluations were then shared with the students.

This experience provided challenges for both the instructors and the students. Students reported that interacting with two faculty members with very different styles was overwhelming at times. Students said that they could not figure out how to "please both instructors." We also found it difficult to "please the students and each other." Prior to the completion of this course, students did not appear to be ready to apply, evaluate, and integrate their learning experiences. The students initially told us that they came into the course expecting to be told what they needed to learn, to learn it, and to then demonstrate their knowledge in the traditional classroom modes.

At the completion of the course, formal student course evaluations were generally very positive. Many students have told us they had never experienced this type of course, that they had "never worked so hard or felt so frustrated," but that they had learned a great deal in our course. They also reported feeling better prepared to work in groups and to engage in complex problem-solving experiences.

This course has continued to cause some stir within the college community and especially with administrators and other faculty. The creative parts of the course challenge some of the deeply held beliefs that higher education should be focused on reading, listening, researching, and mastering content. Some individuals continue to look questioningly at group work, body/kinesthetic projects and presentations, drawing

activities, visualizations, listening to music, and creative project presentations which involve the application of complex psychological learning theories. We believe that taking risks and "shaking things up a bit" need to continue to occur. We believe that his course provided positive experiences for both the students and the instructors.